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STAPFER, Paul: *Etudes sur Goethe*. Paris 1906. 8° 291pp.

In Goethe's *Sprüche in Prosa* we read: "Keine Nation hat ein Urtheil als über das, was bei ihr getan und geschrieben ist. . . . Wahre, in alle Zeiten und Nationen eingreifende Urtheile sind sehr selten." The book before us, written by a man of scholarship and culture, the author of many treatises on various phases of literature, corroborates the truth of this severe dictum. Of the two parts which make up the *Etudes* ("Goethe et la littérature de son temps" and "Les chefs-d'oeuvres de Goethe") the first consists of a chapter on "Goethe et Lessing" and one on "Goethe et Schiller." In the former, no trace of jingoism prevents S. from recognizing the marvelous originality of the greatest enemy of French classical drama. The latter is a fine instance of a Frenchman's appreciation of the nobility implied in the friendship of the two great poets and of its importance for the world's literature. Nevertheless, there asserts itself, almost from the first page, a distinctly temperamental bias which must of necessity limit the author's appreciation of Goethe to very narrow bounds. So Goethe's universality appears to S. as an "eclecticism universel" (p. 36), and in last analysis he is but an "amateur sans pareil" concerning whom S. asks himself whether he be truly "un des grands poètes de l'humanité, comme Shakespeare ou comme Molière, et s'il ne serait pas plus justement nommé *le plus grands des Alexandrins*." (p. 69.) An explanation for this utterance is to be found in the following passage in which S. defines the limits of his admiration of Goethe's works: "... dans *Iphigénie en Tauride*, dans *Hermann et Dorothee*, dans les belles et solides parties du premier *Faust*, dans les meilleures portions des poésies lyriques, bref, dans tous les pures chefs-d'oeuvre de Goethe, on met le pied sur la terre ferme, l'oeil se repose sur les contours aussi nets, sur les horizons aussi lumineux que ceux de cette Italie et de cette Grèce classique où le poète admire la réalisation de son idéal. C'est le temps de son robuste paganisme, le temps où il adore la forme, où le réel lui suffit, où la nature sert de modèle à son art, où il se restore et s'égaie sans s'enivrer à la coupe de la vie. Son talent alors est plastique; il a horreur de tout ce qui est vague, indéterminé, nuageux, comme ses maîtres les Grecs, qui faisaient de l'aspiration à quelque chose d'infini un motif de damnation et qui ont précipité dans le Tartare les puissances titaniques où la mythologie personnifiait l'absence de règle et de mesure. Tel a été Goethe dans la meilleure moitié de sa vie; mais tel il n'a point su rester." (pp. 11f.) In other words, what is least thoroughly German in Goethe is what most appeals to our critic.

Very logically, in the second part of his book, S. cares to

discuss only very few works: *Werther*, *Iphigenie*, *Hermann und Dorothea*, *Faust I*. In the first of these the psychological realism appeals to him, and *Faust* satisfies him only on account of the Margaret episode and the wealth of apothegm. Yet even *Faust* is "décousu... non seulement dans la seconde partie, mais même dans la première! Quel capharnaüm d'idées confuses, contradictoires! Quel manque de dessein suivi et de logique!" (p. 163.) In last analysis, nothing remains truly worthy of admiration in its totality, except *Iphigenie* and *Hermann und Dorothea*. *Wilhelm Meister* and the other works (*Götz*, *Egmont*, *Faust II*) being either mentioned in passing, or attacked.

Thus there comes to the fore in this book a most characteristically Romance attitude towards the great German, an attitude best expressed by the words: "Ce qui est achevé satisfait seul l'esprit" (p. 164) and "L'auteur d'*Hermann et Dorothea* n'a point failli à cette grande règle de l'art grec et de l'art français, qui doivent à la logique leur perfection exemplaire." (p. 172.) At least as far as *Hermann und Dorothea* is concerned, this is a step in advance over former French criticism. Deschanel had thought the little epic inferior to Lamartine's *Jocelyn* and Schérer had nothing but sneers for it. Very naturally, to a temperament like Stapfer's the second part of *Faust* would appear merely as a sign of Goethe's decadence, as nothing but "l'immense fouillis d'un bazar en désordre" (p. 64), and "un long tissu d'énigmes et de logoglyphes à deviner." (p. 12.) It is then not to be wondered at that the admirable unity of personality apparent through all Goethe's works and manifold interests should entirely escape S., and that his self-culture should become a source of irritation rather than uplift to him. Baldensperger, in his illuminating study *Goethe en France* points out that in the seventies French criticism bitterly attacked this principle of self-culture represented by Goethe. Interest in the commonweal and in utilitarian ideals had in France become the watchword of the generation that was still suffering from the "débacle." Like the Young Germans of the thirties—Menzel and his associates—Frenchmen for a time saw in Goethe the greatest promulgator of a vicious principle. Stapfer seems to continue this tradition.

This book, then, adds nothing to our comprehension of Goethe, and might well be set aside without further comment, were it not a singularly happy illustration of the limitations in criticism that spring from national idiosyncracies.

When a French savant, evidently anxious to understand the great German poet, free from jingoism, scholarly, intelligent, and sincere, comes to conclusions like those quoted above, must we not feel that very few even of those of a large literary experi-

ence are ever capable of overcoming the trammels of national temperament. This suspicion is deepened by a perusal of Baldensperger's book referred to above; even so appreciative a study as Bonafous's *Kleist* contains conspicuous instances of an inability to enter into the German point of view.

No age before ours has offered such lavish opportunity for acquaintance with the temperament and the literary output of other nations. Steamships, the telegraph, newspapers, and last but not least the teaching in schools and Universities of the literature of other races, all contribute to this end. Yet it is no paradox to say that never has the veneration of our own national individuality been profounder, and never have we been more conscious of our inability fully to enter into the psyche of a foreign race. The old fallacy that all men are essentially equal in temperament, and that all racial differences are merely superficial, has yielded, since Herder and especially since Gobineau, to the recognition of those essential differences which no training and no transplanting can quite overcome.

So for instance, Bourget, one of the most widely intelligent modern Frenchmen, tells of his vigorous efforts to do justice to the English people. He settled at Oxford, lived with Englishmen as an Englishman, and finally came to the conclusion that the viewpoint of the Anglo-Saxon would forever remain a mystery to him. Isolde Kurz, after a sojourn of many years in Italy, could write a poem of almost poignant force, deploring her inability to cease being a foreigner in the land she had learned to love so well.

The attitude towards foreign temperaments has passed through an evolution curiously parallel to that of the theological attitude towards the heterodox. Here to make proselytes was at one time considered the highest duty. When it was discovered that such efforts were futile, even when supported by the sword and the rack, bitterness and contempt for those of a different creed ensued. We have at last reached a point of vantage which enables us to respect all religious convictions without yielding our own. In matters literary, also, has this humane if resigned attitude been forced upon us. Leslie Stephen, in his essay on cosmopolitanism in literature has pointed out that, generally speaking, those elements in a poet which make the most powerful appeal abroad, are his least national characteristics. Any one studying the career of Byron's works on the continent, or of those of Heine outside of Germany, will pay tribute to the sagacity of this remark. Hence, a true understanding of any literature on the part of a foreign nation seems almost impossible. as Goethe remarked in the aphorism quoted above. We may well ask: has foreign criticism ever contributed on an important

scale to an understanding of German literature? or: does Taine furnish the only instance of a fundamental misconception of the quality of English letters coming from a superior foreign critic? Wordsworth and Browning find few admirers outside of English speaking countries, and if so many-sided a genius as Goethe fails to appeal to so critically acute a nation as the French, how can men like Hebbel and Raabe, gnarled and idiosyncratic, ever find an intelligent hearing outside of their own country?

Very characteristically, the reason why Goethe's work as a whole fails to appeal to a critic like Stapfer, resides in the fact that to Stapfer much of his work offends against what he calls "la bonne santé du goût français" (p. 64). He congratulates his nation on having stoutly refused to be lured into an admiration of the second part of Faust. An intelligent German would feel that a people so strongly determined by "la bonne santé du goût," greatly though it profit thereby, would never produce a Luther or a Beethoven. Very significantly, France has hardly ever been capable of doing full justice to her own turbulent Diderot.

To teachers of modern literature this book and the train of thought it suggests is of especial interest. None of us would deny the immense advantages flowing from our modern impassionate preference for our own national individuality. Who would not hail with pleasure the fact that we moderns feel ourselves do deeply rooted in our own soil? In matters of literature, this feeling has led to a careful and loving study of the monuments of our national past and to important discoveries in this field. The name of the Grimms alone suffices to prove the vitality of this impulse. On the other hand, there lurks here an element of serious danger. Patriotism and jingoism are twin-sisters, and love for one's own literature and blindness for every other are almost as nearly related. Worse than that, a certain tendency to misplace emphasis is too frequently the result of lack of correction from without. The position of Schiller in Germany, of Tennyson in England, of Victor Hugo in France seems a case in point.

It is precisely the function of modern-language teaching to encourage on a large scale critical hospitality to ideals contrary to our own traditions. And never has the need of such teaching been greater than to-day.

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